

9 April 1965

SPECIAL DCI BRIEFINGS  
FOR SENATOR STENNES

VIETNAM

- I. There is a relative lull in the fighting in South Vietnam at present, but it has ominous connotations.
  - A. The Viet Cong main force units are probably regrouping for a new outburst of large-scale attacks.
  - B. There appears to be a particularly substantial build-up in the northernmost provinces of South Vietnam, which probably includes regular formations of the North Vietnamese army for the first time.
  - C. In North Vietnam, where our air strikes are working their way farther north and closer to Hanoi, we have encountered air opposition, and yesterday we spotted a surface-to-air missile site under construction near Hanoi.
- II. The burst of Viet Cong activity which followed the truce the Communists observed early in February, for the lunar New Year, tapered off again in late

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March. For the past two or three weeks, the Viet Cong have been stressing terrorist activity and small-scale attacks. The incident rate is running below the corresponding period in 1964, and now is at the lowest level since the week of the New Year truce.

- A. While there have been fewer major engagements, however, they have been more intense, and on a larger scale. Casualty figures for February and March this year, on both the government and Communist side, are higher than they were in 1964.
- B. It is also significant that most of the major engagements in March resulted from government initiative. Main force units have shown a tendency to avoid engagement if possible.
- C. The aggressiveness of government forces is encouraging, but the behavior of the Viet Cong main force units must be viewed with caution. When they have been engaged, the Viet Cong appear to have been grouped in unusually large concentrations, and willing to offer stiff resistance. This suggests

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re-grouping and re-positioning of the Viet Cong main force in preparation for a renewed burst of major operations.

D. From a statistical point of view, the military situation in March appears to have been somewhat more favorable for the government than it was in February.

1. The killed-in-action ratio for March was up to almost three Viet Cong for one GVN soldier (1,916 to 644) compared to just over two-to-one (1,873 to 880) in February.
2. The ratio of weapons losses continued against the government--3,760 to 1,991 for the two months. Viet Cong weapon losses, however, include only those taken in combat actions. In addition, large quantities have been found in recent weeks in arms caches, uncovered either by the sinking of gun-runners or by information furnished by peasants or defectors. One of these arms caches was a major haul--enough weapons for 5,000 men.

(MAP, South Vietnam)

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III. The massing of Viet Cong forces is particularly noteworthy in the northernmost provinces.

A. A substantial Viet Cong build-up, both by infiltration and by redeployment, has been evident for some time in the five provinces of the I Corps area and adjacent Kontum Provinces in II Corps.

1. In the past year, MACV strength figures for confirmed Viet Cong main force units in these provinces have risen from about 7,000 men to more than 11,000.
2. These, however, are minimum figures showing only the presence of those guerrilla units we can identify by two separate sources. Adding the units accepted as "probable" by MACV, the Viet Cong strength in the northern provinces is estimated at 16,000 men, organized in two regimental headquarters, 23 battalions, and 77 separate companies.

B. A sizable portion of this Communist forces appears to be concentrated in two areas: one in western Kontum Province near the Laotian border, the other around [REDACTED] near the coast.

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C. A North Vietnamese who defected to the government on March 23 says he was a member of the 2nd Battalion of the 101st Regiment of the North Vietnamese Army. He says the 2nd Battalion is deployed in Kontum Province, along with the 1st and 3rd. MACV says the 2nd Battalion has already been in action against a Vietnamese Ranger force, that the 1st and 3rd are probably in South Vietnam, and that other elements of the North Vietnamese 325th Division are possibly also deployed in South Vietnam, around the Da Nang area.

D.

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a headquarters element of the 325th may be located along the Laotian border of Kontum Province. This is the first instance of good evidence that regular formations of the North Vietnamese Army are located inside South Vietnam.

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E. If there is in fact a North Vietnamese regiment in Kontum Province, this would give the Communists a local numerical edge, and a wider range of offensive capabilities.

We think the North Vietnamese, for the present at least, would be used in the same way the Viet Cong main force units are used--that is, to attack targets of opportunity, while avoiding clashes where heavy US and South Vietnamese firepower and air support could be brought into play.

1. Regular North Vietnamese units have long been used in Laos as stiffeners for local forces, for the most part keeping in the background. Hanoi has continued to deny their presence in Laos, and can be expected to take the same tack in South Vietnam.

F. Farther to the east, near the vital US air base at Da Nang, there also appears to have been a recent build-up of Viet Cong strength.

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March revealed that a Viet Cong military command element had moved to within 20 miles of Da Nang.

2. Two subordinate elements of this command headquarters have also been located, 20 miles northwest and 20 miles southwest of Da Nang respectively.

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G. There are unconfirmed reports from low-level sources that elements of the North Vietnamese 325th Division may be in the mountains west of Da Nang, as well as in Kontum. Although Da Nang is well protected, the possibility cannot be ruled out that the Viet Cong will attempt to engage the US marines guarding the base, at least in a probing action, if not an all-out attack.

(MAP, North Vietnam)

IV. We have been stepping up the pace of our air strikes against North Vietnam, and hitting tar-

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has been little adverse effect on public morale in North Vietnam, (at least through mid-March. This type of reporting is not always up-to-the-minute.)

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A. In recent days, North Vietnam appears to have been making a greater effort to discredit US military strength and to exaggerate our losses.

1. For instance, they claim to have shot down about 10 times as many pilots as we have actually lost.
2. This could indicate a growing concern on the part of the regime over the morale of the North Vietnamese population.
3. By and large, however, Hanoi appears to have been mainly concerned over possible disruption of the economy, rather than public order or the military establishment.

B. Our own reconnaissance and damage assessment shows that the total military effect of the air strikes has not been great.

1. You will recall that we began with targets which had a retaliatory significance: when patrol boats engaged our destroyers in August, we bombed patrol boat bases and their fuel depots.

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When terrorists blew up the US billets at Pleiku, we bombed North Vietnamese military barracks near the demarcation line.

2. In the next phase, targets were primarily military installations near the 17th parallel supporting the infiltration operations into South Vietnam.
3. Since we have stepped up the pace of the attacks, we have been going after targets of general military significance such as ammunition and supply dumps, radar sites, and important railway and highway bridges.

C. Strike results against the several categories of targets have varied.

1. Ammunition and storage depots have suffered the most damage. We estimate, for example, that 8 to 9 percent of North Vietnam's total capacity for storing ammunition has been destroyed. Two major supply depots, north of Vinh, also sustained heavy damage.

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2. Raids against radar sites and other early warning installations have not been as successful, primarily because of the small size and mobility of these targets. Only one of the nine radar sites attacked is considered to be totally knocked out.
3. The recent strikes against two major bridges have been the most effective, from the military and economic viewpoint, and even more from a psychological point of view. The Thanh Hoa and Dong Phong Thuong road and rail bridges are only about 80 miles from Hanoi. Our post-strike photography still leaves some room for question, but one bridge appears to have collapsed, and the other should be unusable for some time.
4. There will certainly be some effect on transportation south from the Hanoi and Haiphong area. At the same time, alternate routes are available, and North Vietnam got along without this route for some 19 years. The Thanh Hoa bridge

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was reopened in May, 1964, for the first time since the end of World War II.

D. The North Vietnamese have been able to reduce the effectiveness of the raids by some precautions they appear to have taken in advance.

1. There is some evidence that Hanoi kept its early warning capability intact by dismantlement, dispersal, and camouflage. Some of the radar sites may have been evacuated between the preliminary photographic targeting and the actual air strike.
2. In answer to the armed road reconnaissances by our aircraft, North Vietnamese trucks have been ordered to move by night as much as possible. If daylight movement is unavoidable, the trucks must maintain aircraft lookouts and be camouflaged.
3. After the early strikes against naval bases, all major naval craft received orders setting strict procedures for dispersal and concealment. They were enjoined to fire only if attacked, to avoid revealing their positions.

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- E. The raids on the bridges in the north evoked the first intervention by enemy aircraft. Two of our strike aircraft were shot down.
1. In partial explanation, the attack came with little warning, and the planes we lost were jumped from behind while carrying their full bomb loads.
  2. On the debit side of the ledger, the fact remains that two MIG jets of Korean war vintage--MIG-17s--successfully shot down two aircraft of our Century series, and apparently got away unscathed, although there are some tenuous indications one of the two MIGs may have crashed.
  3. The incident also demonstrated an unexpected level of North Vietnamese proficiency in ground-controlled intercept.
- F. A tabulation of the strikes against North Vietnam through April 7th shows that we have lost some 30 aircraft and 15 of their pilots.
1. In a total of 1,368 sorties through April 3rd, we lost 26 aircraft, or a percentage loss rate of 1.9 percent. This compares with rates of 2.3 percent for

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the early phases of World War II, and  
1.7 percent in the early months of the  
Korean War.

(PHOTO, SAM Site)

- V. Yesterday, analyzing aerial photography of April 5th, we found a surface-to-air missile site under construction about 15 miles southeast of Hanoi.
- A. No missiles or other weapons equipment have been noted at the site, but the construction is about three-quarters finished.
- B. It appears to be the standard six-pointed star configuration of the SA-2 missile system. Four revetted launch positions have been finished. Two more launch positions and a revetted control area are still under construction, along with a perimeter road and a possible missile-hold area.
1. There is an unoccupied position next to the missile site, prepared for six medium anti-aircraft guns.
2. The last clear photography of this area, on February 21st, showed only the anti-aircraft battery site.

- C. We have to assume that the equipment for the missile site is coming from the Soviet Union. The Chinese Communists have practically none.
1. A week ago, the Soviets were circulating reports that the Chinese Communists were obstructing Soviet attempts to ship military equipment overland to North Vietnam.
  2. In the last two or three days, the Soviets have floated new reports that Moscow and Peiping have reached agreement on such shipments, and that the equipment is flowing to Hanoi.
  3. The original reports may have been just so much eyewash, designed to relax our watchfulness for the arrival of Soviet help in North Vietnam. They had enough currency, however, and enough potential embarrassment for both Moscow and Peiping, to suggest they probably had some validity.
  4. In any event, a complete surface-to-air missile system could be moved by rail from the Soviet border to North Vietnam inside a week.

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E. Soviet ships continue to arrive in North Vietnam, but we have had no grounds so far to believe that any of them have brought specific military cargo.

1. There is one 12,000-ton ship now under way, just past Suez, which shows all the signs of being an arms carrier, including a light load of just over 3,000 tons. This ship could be heading for India, Indonesia, or North Vietnam.

VI. As for Communist China, there has been no evidence of any significant Chinese Communist troop movement in the past two months. The Chinese already have about a quarter of a million men within 200 miles of the Laotian and Vietnamese frontiers in position to cross the border on short notice.

- A. There has been no additional deployment of military aircraft from China into North Vietnam since last August, when 36 MIG-15 or MIG-17 fighters were moved to Phuc Yen airfield near Hanoi.

1. These are the fighters which have been reacting to our air strikes, although the only contact was the incident at the rail bridges on April 4th.

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indicates that the aircraft are directed and flown by Vietnamese.

VII. Communist propaganda continues to reflect a determination to continue and even increase the level of military action against US forces and installations in South Vietnam.

A. This determination was expressed by Hanoi as recently as April 4th--after the strike against the Thanh Hoa Bridge--in a communique of the Council of Ministers.

B. In South Vietnam the Liberation Front maintains an even more aggressively determined posture, promising to continue the fighting in South Vietnam for 5, 10, or even 20 years if necessary.

1. On March 22nd the Front announced that if the US continued to increase the commitment of its forces to South Vietnam, the Front might seek foreign assistance in the form of military personnel.



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2. All three Asian Communist powers responded. Hanoi's Fatherland Front declared that the southerners regrouped to North Vietnam as a result of the Geneva agreements of 1954 were ready to return to the South to fight if the Front called them back. Peiping and Pyongyang also stated that many of their citizens were ready to volunteer to go to South Vietnam when and if the Front called for them.
- C. Although Peiping's overall-political and propaganda response to the air strikes has been vitriolic, the Chinese have not committed themselves to any specific countermeasures. A People's Daily editorial on April 5th, for example, restated the Chinese position that the struggle of the Vietnamese people is "our struggle," but then asserted in general terms only that the Chinese people "pledge themselves to stand by the 30 million Vietnamese people and to fight together" to the end.

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VIII. As for the political situation in Saigon, there is little question that the South Vietnamese government, the military leadership, and a substantial part of the informed public have all received a morale boost from the air strikes on North Vietnam and the employment of US jet aircraft against the Viet Cong in the South.

A. This lift derives in large part from the Vietnamese inference of a deeper and more solid US military and political commitment, and an apparent expectation that the war will be accordingly shortened and won. Some Vietnamese are already urging an accompanying diplomatic initiative. They claim to see signs of lowered Viet Cong morale.

B. The improvement in morale in the South, however, could easily be reversed. Continued evidence of Communist determination to resist and of Viet Cong deployment for a renewed military offensive carries a clear danger that the South Vietnamese may rapidly become discouraged again. They are probably

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weary of the prospect of an expanded, drawn-out conflict on their territory.

1. This could lead either to interest in a local accommodation with the Viet Cong, or to clamor for the US to press the war against the North, or even against Communist China.

C. Politically, there have been surface indications of improvement in Saigon, primarily because of a temporary power accommodation among the military, and the absence of Buddhist agitation against the Quat government. Reporting, however, continues to reflect suspicions and rivalries among top generals. Military factionalism is rendered more serious because these divisions are influenced by current Catholic distrust of Quat and of the Buddhists, and by a degree of "wait-and-seeism" on the part of the Buddhists themselves.

1. Symptomatic of the military unrest, junior South Vietnamese naval officers

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mutinied yesterday against their commander. They complain that he has remained loyal to General Khanh, and is allegedly incompetent and corrupt.

2. The Armed Forces Council plans an early meeting to discuss the mutiny. There are some indications that it may have reflected even more widespread dissatisfaction with the military leadership as a whole.

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